Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Phil Andrews   February 15, 2013

Contact: 240-777-7906

Statement of Councilmember Andrews on Proposed Pay Increases for County Employees

NEWS RELEASE

ROCKVILLE, Md., February 15, 2013—Montgomery County Councilmember Phil Andrews, chief sponsor of the County's Living Wage law passed in 2002, today made the following statement on the agreement reached between County Executive Isiah Leggett and the Municipal and County Government Employees Organization (MCGEO) for Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015 pay increases. The agreement includes provisions for 3.5 percent increment increases and 3.25 percent COLAs in each of FY14 and FY15 for most County Government employees.

The complete text of the statement of Councilmember Andrews:

The agreement between County Executive Isiah Leggett and the County general employees union (MCGEO) for pay increases that total 13.5 percent for most employees over the next two years is excessive, unsustainable and irresponsible. The cost of this labor contract, which could exceed $40 million over three years, is larger than the County can afford, and will likely substantially exceed pay increases that federal employees and private sector employees will see in the near future. (President Obama recently proposed a 1 percent cost-of-living-adjustment for federal employees for next year.)

County employees deserve a pay raise after several difficult years, but one that is sustainable for taxpayers, that does not create unrealistic expectations and that does not encourage other public employee unions, whose agreements also are funded by County taxpayers, to ask for as much.

At a time when the County Executive has asked agency and department heads to prepare for another austere year, his lack of any explanation of how he would pay for these sizeable pay increases is striking. If his earlier indications about the budget are true, the money to pay for these pay increases will directly compete with funding for important services.

County Executive Leggett is repeating the mistakes of the recent past by again agreeing to a labor contract that will, if approved by the County Council, hamstring the County's fiscal future. In spring 2008, for example, on the cusp of the severe recession, County Executive Leggett agreed to a three-year labor contract with career firefighters that called for similar increases in the first two years to the pay increases just announced, and a 10.5 percent increase for most career firefighters in the third year. The cost-of-living increase in year two of that contract had to be cancelled and the entire 10.5 percent pay increase in year three had to be eliminated.

I was the only Councilmember who voted against that 2008 contract (as well as the two other County labor contracts that year, and the 2005 labor contract negotiated by then County Executive Douglas Duncan that provided full retirement benefits for firefighters who retire after only 20 years). I will vote against this contract as well, and will urge my Council colleagues to do the same, unless the Council reduces the pay increases to a sustainable level.

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